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Joint Inspection Unit

Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations Secretariat

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations Secretariat" (JIU/REP/2011/2).

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I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit submitted its report entitled "Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations Secretariat" (JIU/REP/2011/2) in response to paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 64/259. As the Secretariat is constantly updating and improving its processes, the review by the Unit aims to strengthen previous and ongoing efforts to ensure the effectiveness, coherence, timeliness and transparency of the selection and appointment of senior managers in the Secretariat. The Secretary-General believes that the process outlined in his report entitled "Towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat" (A/64/640), read in conjunction with the present document, provides a coherent picture of the process of appointing senior managers. The Secretary-General wishes to extend his appreciation to the Unit for the constructive exchange of views.

2. The selection and appointment of senior managers is a complex process. It should be noted that while there is consistency of purpose, each Secretary-General may have a different approach to implementing the process. To this end, the Secretary-General requires a measure of flexibility and discretion to be able to select a cohesive senior management team that works in synergy. The present report summarizes the objectives of the Secretary-General in selecting his senior leadership team and outlines his approach to the selection and appointment of senior managers in the United Nations Secretariat. The core principle is merit. In the search for the most suitable person for a particular position, the Secretary-General takes great care to ensure the fairness and transparency of the process while protecting the privacy of the candidates and panel members.

II. Objective for senior appointments

3. The objective of the Secretary-General is to have an effective senior leadership team with the highest standards of efficiency, competence, integrity and accountability that is capable of driving the Organization in response to evolving organizational needs and meets the expectations of Member States and other stakeholders.

4. The ability and authority of the Secretary-General to achieve this objective and effectively manage the Organization as its chief administrative officer in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter of the United Nations require a robust selection and appointment process that is effective, coherent, timely and transparent and that has due regard for the confidentiality of the process and the privacy of the candidates.

5. The General Assembly recognized the Secretary-General's need for a measure of flexibility with regard to the selection and appointment of senior managers in section II, paragraph 5, of its resolution 51/226, by which it specified that the discretionary power of the Secretary-General of appointment and promotion outside the established procedures should be limited to his Executive Office and the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels, as well as special envoys at all levels.

6. In his report to the General Assembly entitled "Towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat", the Secretary-General outlined the process for the selection and appointment of senior managers and stated that he had

voluntarily exercised the discretionary authority entrusted to him with great care to ensure transparency and maintain the institutional safeguards of the process, while protecting the privacy of the applicants (see A/64/640, para. 42).

III. Selection and appointment of senior managers

7. Building on progress made to date, the Secretary-General attaches great importance to the following elements in the selection and appointment of senior managers in the Secretariat. These interrelated elements must be considered in a holistic manner.

A. Merit

8. Article 101 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations reads: "The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible." In accordance with the Charter, the Secretary-General believes that the core principle in the recruitment of senior staff is merit. In considering finalists who have proved that they meet the core requirements of a post, the Secretary-General must also take into consideration other important elements to ensure that the selected candidate is a good fit within the management team and that the selection decision enhances the Organization's objectives in terms of geographical distribution and gender representation.

B. Geographical distribution and gender representation

9. When the Secretary-General makes a selection decision, he is committed to the overall need to ensure equitable geographical distribution and gender representation in his senior management team. This represents a snapshot of his senior team, which is constantly changing as a result of ongoing recruitment and the expiration of appointments; the selection and appointment process must therefore be equally responsive. The Secretary-General regularly monitors statistical data with respect to geographical distribution and gender representation in his team of senior managers, as well as mobility at the highest levels.

10. The Secretary-General has ensured that posts traditionally held by people of the same nationality are occupied by people of a different nationality from that of their predecessor. Such posts include those of Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Under-Secretary-General for Management and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna. When the Secretary-General has not been able to make a change owing to unforeseen or other circumstances, he has duly informed Member States before the General Assembly has approved such appointments, as was the case for the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security and the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services.

11. In accordance with the directive of the Secretary-General, interview panels involved in the appointment of senior managers must present him with at least three

candidates for consideration, at least one of whom must be a woman. The Secretary-General then consults with his senior advisers, including the Deputy Secretary-General, in making his selection decision. The current Secretary-General has appointed the highest number of women to senior management positions. In the past three years, 15 women have been appointed to positions at the level of Under-Secretary-General, 8 of whom were appointed special representatives of the Secretary-General. The gender-related statistics have in general improved and further, significant, improvements are under way.

C. Transparency

12. While the issue of the appropriate level of transparency in the appointment process can be highly subjective, the Secretary-General is mindful of the need to share information with Member States while protecting the confidentiality of the process and the privacy of the candidates. Transparency in the methodology applied to the process of selecting and appointing senior managers requires (a) that an open and responsive exchange of information and views with the widest spectrum of stakeholders be available to the Secretary-General; (b) a clearly articulated process for the selection of the senior team; and (c) accountability for results.

13. While a number of measures are being implemented to improve and make the process more transparent, the final decision-making process must remain confidential. For direct appointments, the Secretary-General is the only person who should determine, in the final analysis, which of the recommended candidates would be the best fit and who should be included in the senior management team.

D. Confidentiality of the process and privacy of candidates and panel members

14. While balancing the need for transparency with the need to protect the confidentiality of the process and the privacy of the candidates, the Secretary-General keeps Member States informed, through the Chairs of the regional groups, by providing an overview of the selection and appointment process, including efforts made to attract candidates and his views with regard to the conclusion of the process and selection of the best candidate for a particular position.

15. In this regard, the need for confidentiality (including political sensitivity, credibility of the mission and effectiveness of the incumbent) and a streamlined process would make it impractical to involve individuals other than the lead office handling the position in the selection and appointment process. In accordance with established practice, all screening and reference-checking of candidates is conducted in coordination with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. It should also be noted that disclosure of the terms of reference and other details regarding each interview panel has the potential to compromise the confidentiality of the process.

E. Search process and maintaining institutional safeguards

16. Bearing in mind the guiding principles set forth in the preceding paragraphs, it may be helpful to have a more detailed explanation of the process and the interlinkages of the various steps.

17. The Secretary-General believes that a clear process enhances the objectivity with which a well-considered shortlist of candidates from both inside and outside the Organization is submitted to him for consideration. Such a process enhances transparency by bringing to the attention of Member States upcoming openings in a timely manner and enables the Secretary-General to select the most competent candidates, maintaining due regard for geographical distribution and gender representation.

18. With respect to senior appointments at the levels of Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General, upcoming openings are reviewed by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General on an ongoing basis. In accordance with established practice, the selection process is initiated at least four months in advance of the expiry of the incumbent's appointment. At the request of the Executive Office, each month the Office of Human Resources Management provides a list of senior appointments, including the name and title of the officials concerned, as well as the date of entry on duty and expiry of each appointment. The Executive Office uses such information to monitor appointments that are due to expire in the subsequent four months, in order to process the necessary extensions and/or initiate succession planning as needed.

19. For field appointments, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support work in collaboration with the Executive Office in identifying appointments that might require consideration for extension within three months from the date of expiry of each appointment. It should be noted that in some cases initiating the recruitment process too early might have significant implications. For example, there may be a concern regarding the need to avoid undermining a serving senior manager by advertising his or her position in advance. Once the upcoming openings have been identified, the mandate and objectives of a particular post as they are outlined in the mandating General Assembly resolutions and/or other legislative instruments are examined, particularly for new appointments. Existing terms of reference are also examined and revised, as needed, in close collaboration with the department concerned.

1. Announcement of vacancies

20. With respect to soliciting nominations, notes verbales are customarily sent to Member States to complement the efforts of the Secretary-General and to help compile a list of candidates that is broader and more balanced, both in terms of geographical distribution and gender representation. It has also been the practice to request nominations from Member States in cases where consultations with intergovernmental bodies are necessary or required. If deemed necessary, nominations are also sought from the relevant professional community. In certain cases, it may be neither practical nor politically viable to have all vacancies, particularly field-based vacancies, announced to all Member States considering that advance announcements may negatively affect the credibility of a field mission or compromise the effectiveness of the incumbent.

21. Upcoming openings may also be advertised on the website of the Secretary-General and in print media. In doing so, every effort is made to reach the widest possible audience. Reputable publications have been used for this purpose. In determining where advertisements are placed, consultations are held on the nature of the functions and the likelihood that a broader search is necessary to obtain a competitive pool of candidates.

2. Pre-screening and review of candidates

22. Once a pool of candidates has been obtained, an interview panel is composed. Panel members are selected, for each vacancy, from among senior United Nations officials bearing in mind their background, geographical origin and gender. The shortlisting of candidates to be interviewed is done by the panel members. The Secretary-General believes that there is value added in the established practice of having the panel members pre-screen and review the list of individuals who have been nominated for a particular position so they may select a smaller pool of qualified and diverse candidates to be interviewed. This also allows the panel members to invite more candidates to interviews from among the pool should they find the initial group not suitable, following the interview. In the course of finalizing arrangements, a determination is made in respect of the need to have an outside expert, bearing in mind the nature of the position. The presence of external panel members, including experts in humanitarian and human rights law, as well as experts with related thematic know-how, brings added perspective and expertise to the process.

23. Every effort is made to have all candidates reviewed by the same interview panel. Following review by the panel, the Secretary-General is presented with three candidates, at least one of whom must be a woman. The Secretary-General consults with his senior advisers, including the Deputy Secretary-General, in making his decision. While the Secretary-General has broad discretionary authority with regard to appointments at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General, he has made known his keen desire to interview the finalists. However, due to the demands on his schedule, he may choose to request one of his senior advisers to interview, on his behalf, the three candidates shortlisted for a particular position.

24. Every effort is also made to ensure that no posts are left vacant between incumbents, either through proactive succession planning, the extension of the current incumbent's contract or, when circumstances beyond the Secretariat's control require it, the designation of an experienced and seasoned officer-in-charge. It should be noted that the date of entry on duty of the selected candidate involves negotiation with the releasing entity and that the outcome of that negotiation is often beyond the control of the Secretary-General. As senior officials work in complex environments, transferring them from their high-level positions to the United Nations is not a straightforward process and frequently requires adjustments in the reporting date. In such cases, the Secretariat makes arrangements for the appropriate handover of duties to occur between the incoming and outgoing manager.

3. Sharing information with Member States

25. Another important element of the process of appointing senior managers involves consultations with Member States. The process of consultation is well established and has led to the successful filling of positions falling under this

established procedure. The Secretary-General goes to great lengths to ensure that he engages in both informal and formal consultation with Member States, as appropriate.

IV. Selection and appointment processes currently under way

26. At the start of his second term, early in 2012, the Secretary-General will have the opportunity to fill a number of upper-echelon positions. The Secretary-General is keen to ensure the right mix of change and continuity in his senior leadership team and intends to build a new team that is strong on substantive issues and diverse in composition and whose members complement one another. In so doing, the Secretary-General will also be guided by the following three overarching considerations:

(a) The five-year rule will be applied across the board, as it was five years ago when the Secretary-General first assumed office. While some senior advisers with fewer than five years of service may relinquish their positions for personal and other reasons, those at the five-year mark will be the focus of the change. This is to demonstrate the Secretary-General's firm commitment to mobility and to leading by example by providing a top-down push to the ongoing human resources management reform, which includes mobility schemes;

(b) The Secretary-General intends to balance the need to bring a fresh perspective in addressing major challenges with the need to maintain continuity of purpose and priorities;

(c) The Secretary-General will continue to focus on empowering line departments and on leveraging organizational synergy by streamlining work processes and minimizing institutional duplication.

27. Against this backdrop, the Secretary-General has decided to seek nominations for the first batch of eight positions at the level of Under-Secretary-General for the departments and offices listed below. These changes have been announced in advance in order to provide ample time for receiving and reviewing nominations and to ensure a smooth transition between incumbents. This effort will supplement the Secretary-General's own search and consultations and demonstrates his commitment to having an inclusive and objective selection process for the appointment of senior managers. The entities involved are the following:

The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

The Department of Public Information

The Department of Political Affairs

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs

The Office for Disarmament Affairs

The Office of the Special Adviser for Africa

The Economic Commission for Africa

The Economic Commission for Europe

28. In addition, the recruitment and selection process for five positions in the funds and programmes, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General, has also been initiated.

V. Recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit

Recommendation regarding the website

29. In line with the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit regarding the creation of a dedicated website (see JIU/REP/2011/2, para. 88), the Secretary-General notes that progress has been made with respect to the posting of vacancies online, when feasible. In order to enhance the sharing of information, the Secretary-General has developed a web page that contains information on upcoming vacancies (un.org/sg/vacancies/index.shtml). The web page will be updated as necessary to convey specific information on senior appointments at the level of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General. It is also worth noting that the Department of Public Information has a web page on senior appointments. In addition, the Secretary-General uses the web-based tool deleGATE to transmit all notes verbales on senior appointments to Member States so that up-to-date information on upcoming vacancies is disseminated in a timely manner. This is also supportive of efforts to "green the United Nations".

30. The Secretary-General believes that the sub-recommendations regarding the information to be disclosed to the public and Member States on the web page requires careful study to ensure that the information does not mislead the intended audience and safeguards the confidentiality of the process and the privacy of the candidates and panel members, as mentioned above.

Guidelines

31. The Secretary-General is pleased to note that the majority of the guidelines identified by the Joint Inspection Unit (see JIU/REP/2011/2, para. 87) are in line with the established practice that is followed in the process of appointing senior managers. Efforts will continue to be made to build upon this recommendation with a view to strengthening and enhancing the process.

32. The Secretary-General supports 8 of the 12 guidelines outlined by the Joint Inspection Unit. The exceptions are those contained in subparagraphs 87 (a), (b), (c), (g) and (l), as indicated below.

Subparagraph 87 (a)

The recruitment process should be planned to allow for a minimum of two weeks of overlap between the two incumbents.

33. While there are advantages to having an overlap between incoming and outgoing senior appointees in field missions, possible political, chain-of-command, resource and other implications need to be considered. A shorter overlap period, depending on the profile and experience of the incoming appointee, may be more realistic for field appointments. Member States are invited to provide the necessary budgetary authority to regularize this practice.

Subparagraph 87 (b)

Vacancy announcements should be issued for all positions except for special envoys and personal advisers as soon as it is known that a vacancy will arise, stipulating clearly defined responsibilities and specific qualifications/experience required in unambiguous terms.

34. Although significant improvements have been made in this regard, it may not be appropriate to circulate vacancy announcements in cases where doing so could negatively affect the credibility of an operation or compromise the effectiveness of the incumbent.

Subparagraph 87 (c)

Notes verbales transmitting vacancy announcements for every position should be sent to all Member States and all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes with at least one month's notice.

35. The Secretary-General is committed to the process of advertising and requesting nominations from Member States for the great majority of positions at Headquarters. For instance, at the start of his second term he circulated vacancy announcements for nine positions at the level of Under-Secretary-General. The Secretary-General notes that extensive efforts are customarily made to reach out to relevant partners of the United Nations (including by setting up ongoing campaigns to create a roster of talent) in cases where it is neither practical nor desirable to advertise vacancies, specifically vacancies for field positions that require political sensitivity to the situation on the ground. Therefore, while guaranteeing institutional safeguards and an overall fair and consistent selection process, the Secretary-General must be accorded the necessary flexibility to determine when and how to advertise vacancies.

Subparagraph 87 (g)

At the conclusion of its work, the interview panel should prepare a summary report detailing the information as indicated in the website per paragraphs 88 (f) and (g) below. This report should be shared by the Secretary-General in his consultations with Member States.

36. The interview panel advises the Secretary-General and must be able to provide frank and candid advice to the Secretary-General with the assurance of confidentiality. In addition, all communication between the panel and the Secretary-General must remain confidential. Making public the deliberations of panels involved in the appointment of senior managers or subjecting their recommendations to review by a third party would irrevocably affect the integrity and effectiveness of those deliberations. The disclosure of such information may discourage potential candidates from participating in the selection process for fear of intrusion in their privacy. If panel members are aware that their deliberations are not confidential, they may not provide the Secretary-General with their frank and unfiltered feedback for fear of retribution, which will greatly affect the quality and integrity of the process. The practice of according confidentiality to interview panels is consistent with the Organization's practice with regard to the recruitment of staff for positions at other levels.

Subparagraph 87 (l)

Biannual briefings should be held by the Secretary-General for Permanent Representatives on the selection process and appointments made in the preceding six months summarizing the information contained in the reports of interview panels as per the guideline in paragraph 87 (g) above.

37. This recommendation duplicates the briefings that the Secretary-General currently undertakes with the Chairs of the regional groups, who in turn brief their respective Member States. During his consultations, the Secretary-General provides an overview of the selection and appointment process, including efforts made to attract candidates and his views with regard to the conclusion of the process and selection of the best candidate for a particular position. As part of an ongoing effort to enhance the transparency of the process, the Secretary-General is developing a briefing on senior appointments, including expected openings, to be included in the orientation programme for new delegates in order to continue his efforts to keep Member States abreast of developments and sensitize them to the process for the selection and appointment of senior managers.